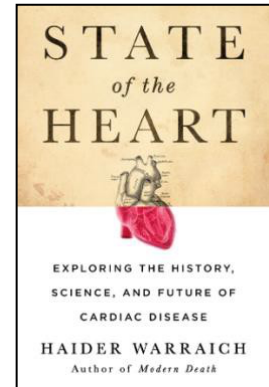


Discussion Guide

State of the Heart: Exploring the History, Science, and Future of Cardiac Disease

By Haider Warraich, MD

1. Warraich calls heart disease “the overlooked affliction of our times” despite affecting so many people, and he notes that many people and institutions funding research think of it as a battle already won. What are your thoughts on the fight against heart disease? What signs do you see of the battle being over and what indications do you find that it is still in progress?
2. Warraich provides stories throughout the book about patients he has encountered and historical figures in science and especially cardiology. Whom did you find most interesting and why?
3. At different points in the book, Warraich relates various metaphors used to describe the heart, such as a temple, stream, pump, and even air traffic control tower. What description of the heart resonates most with your perception of it? Why?
4. William Harvey came to a very different conception of the heart and blood than philosophers like Galen because he based it on the experiments he conducted. He also faced considerable opposition to his ideas. What are some of the modern-day challenges to good science and effective treatment that Warraich mentions throughout the book? How do subjects like technology, economics and human behavior tie into them?
5. Why does the heart attack hold such a place in the public imagination compared to most other illnesses? How does understanding the origins of the heart attack affect your perception of the disease?
6. Why is lowering blood pressure considered one of the most life-saving clinical interventions known? How can we lower it?
7. How much of your understanding about cholesterol – both the “good” and the “bad” kind – matched the information presented by Warraich? Where did differences come up?
8. What do you think of the controversy surrounding statins and the author’s assurances that they are among the safest drugs available? Are you a “statin skeptic”? How do you establish trust with your health-care provider on treatments and other issues? How do you evaluate the medical information you receive from various sources, whether about the heart or something else?
9. How do you feel about where the medical community has been and is now with respect to understanding and treating heart disease in women? How do men and women differ in their experiences of heart disease?



10. Warraich writes, “Even though, to this day, more people die of heart disease than cancer, cancer continues to be considered the greatest disease of our age.” What do you think of this assessment?
11. How do you react to the author’s assessment that heart disease is often blamed on the patient’s lifestyle choices while cancer is seen as an invasion of the patient’s body by the disease?
12. If you are not currently on a Left Ventricular Assist Device (LVAD), how would your day-to-day life differ if you had to be put on one? What activities would be nearly the same? If you do use an LVAD and care to share about it, how does Warraich’s description of it compare to your reality?
13. Warraich describes how designers of LVADs switched from a version that pulsated to one that whirred continuously, and how the LVAD on a coded patient kept running long after attempts to revive him failed. Are the advancements in the care of the heart described in the book changing essential parts of what it means to be human? If so, how do you feel about that? If not, what in your opinion are the essential parts?

Terms of Use: This discussion guide was created by the Network of the National Library of Medicine and does not reflect the views or opinions of the author or publisher. Created January 2020.